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SUBJECT: JORDANIAN FOREIGN POLICY REACHES INTO CENTRAL ASIA

REF: A. AMMAN 1329

- [¶](#)B. AMMAN 898
- [¶](#)C. 07 AMMAN 4678
- [¶](#)D. 07 AMMAN 4430
- [¶](#)E. 07 AMMAN 4207
- [¶](#)F. 07 AMMAN 3755
- [¶](#)G. 04 AMMAN 9152

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[¶](#)1. (C) Summary: Jordan, with the heavy personal engagement of King Abdullah, has been reaching beyond the Middle East for partners on a variety of energy, economic, and political issues. Of particular note are the efforts expended on improving and expanding ties with former Soviet republics in Central Asia, particularly Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. The motivation for extending Jordan's foreign policy reach seems to be a mixture of diversifying energy and food sources, finding new strategic allies, enticing foreign investment, spreading Jordan's brand of moderate Islam, countering Iran, and even a dose of the King's boyish adventurism. End Summary.

[¶](#)2. (C) We spoke recently to a number of foreign policy experts and practitioners about Jordan's budding relations with former Soviet republics in Central Asia, especially Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan. A consensus formed on several points:

--Jordan needs more reliable sources of energy and wheat. Both are potentially available from those countries.

--Arabs are unreliable. While the King has substantially improved the poor relations with Gulf dynasties that he inherited from his father, those improved ties are not delivering sufficient economic benefits or a strategy to defeat Iran's regional agenda on the scale of Jordanian expectations.

--The King is looking beyond the Arab cesspool. Unlike his father, Abdullah has little patience for inter-Arab politics and develops practical foreign policies to promote an ambitious program for economic development. As a result, he casts his eyes beyond the immediate neighborhood. He also believes moderate Islam can be a binding factor, both in challenging extremists and finding common ground on other issues. He sees the Hashemite legacy - descent from the Prophet - as a useful tool in this effort.

--Diversification is good. Commentators saw a benefit in developing new markets for trade and the export of Jordanian labor, although they had a harder time identifying what goods Jordan could export there or what language Jordanian laborers would use to communicate in those non-Anglophone markets.

--Countering Iran is also in play. The King believes, and some commentators concur, that Central Asia could function as

a counter to Iran's agenda, by showing an alignment with like-minded states fearful of Iranian hegemony. The King advocates stronger intelligence and military cooperation with the states on Iran's northern border. He also sees an opportunity - not very well defined, or shared in Baku - to use the sizeable Azeri population inside Iran as a pressure point on the Tehran regime.

--Personalities Matter. The King is also partly motivated by the sheer fun of projecting Jordan into frontier territory, such as Central Asia, where money, oil, security challenges, and grand strategy all mix. The fact that this causes him to look at tyrants as possible comrades doesn't faze him. According to an Azeri diplomat here, there is a longstanding personal friendship between Abdullah and President Aliyev, stemming from the 1990s. (The Azeri diplomat acknowledged the many common interests between Jordan and his country, but downplayed the importance of a shared Iran strategy, seeing a gap between Azeri and Jordanian interests and issues, given the Azeri-Iranian shared border.)

--Military Cooperation? We know the Azeris and Jordanians have talked about arms transfers and other areas of security cooperation - something the King thinks makes sense strategically, and also provides a market for his budding domestic arms industry. Ambassador has made clear to the King directly U.S. policy on the transfer of U.S.-origin military equipment to Azerbaijan, but this area bears close monitoring.

Comment

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¶3. (C) The King sees his relationship with the U.S. as the foundation of his national security strategy. However, he sees in an increasingly multipolar world the need to expand ties elsewhere, so long as they do not conflict with his U.S. relations. Frequent trips to China and East Asia aim at developing Jordan's relations there, and leadership changes in Western Europe have opened up the prospect for better ties there, as well, especially with the French and German leaders. The King's effort to knit together a "Group of 11" - eleven countries from around the world with similar lower middle income rankings - has gotten less traction, primarily because the group has little else in common.

¶4. (C) The idea of developing relations with historically marginal areas like Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan appeals to the boy adventurer in him - which is reflected in the somewhat furtive fashion in which this portfolio is being handled (by a palace aide who is uncomfortable talking about his role). Moreover, he sees those countries as able to engage with him in below the radar activities such as arms sales or containing Iran. For the moment, Jordan has not seen a big payoff on the oil issue with either of the two former Soviet republics. As one contact said, nobody in the palace is overly-optimistic about the prospects of Jordan's outreach strategy (except perhaps the King), but nonetheless these are avenues to pursue.

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Hale